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SELF-PROCLAIMED CANNABIS CAREGIVER CHARGED WITH ILLEGAL MARIJUANA CULTIVATION

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that DUSTIN ROBERT COSTA, also known as Reverend DC Greenhouse, 58, of Winton, California, was charged by a federal grand jury with cultivating marijuana, possessing marijuana with the intent to distribute, and possessing a firearm in connection with drug trafficking offenses. COSTA was arrested August 11, 2005.

The case was investigated by the Merced Multi-Agency Narcotic Task Force (MMNTF).

According to court documents, COSTA, who was convicted in 1999 in Stanislaus County of cultivating marijuana, was growing marijuana at his residence in Winton in early 2004. There were 908 growing marijuana plants, and 8.8 pounds of processed marijuana. PG&E records for the electricity usage of COSTA's residence showed an average daily usage of 184 kilowatts, which is unusually high and is consistent with a large indoor marijuana cultivation operation, since indoor marijuana cultivation generally requires the use of high intensity light bulbs and other electrical equipment.

According to his website, COSTA is a "Cannabis Patient," who is a "caregiver" for "many patients." A photo of one of his attorneys, Dennis Roberts, of Oakland, standing next to a table of marijuana, paraphernalia, and cash, was also posted on the website, with the comment that he is holding a "giant 'battlebong,' and appears ready to chuck it at some hapless DA." A bong is a type of water pipe used to smoke marijuana.

Although California voters passed Proposition 215 in 1996, which legalized marijuana for medical use, marijuana remains an illegal drug under federal law, as affirmed by the Supreme Court in June of this year.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar of the Fresno United States Attorney's Office, who is prosecuting the case, COSTA faces a mandatory minimum prison term of five years and a maximum of forty, and a fine of up to \$2,000,000 for each drug charge. For the gun charge, COSTA is facing a mandatory consecutive term of five years.

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